

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 STR-01 AID-05 CEA-01 COME-00 EB-07 EA-06

FRB-03 IO-10 NEA-09 OPIC-03 TRSE-00 CIEP-01 LAB-04

SIL-01 OMB-01 /109 W

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R 241712Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7596

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

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AMCONSUL BELFAST

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS:PINT, PFOR, UK, EC

SUBJECT: WILSON OUTLINES EC REFERENDUM PLAN

REF: LONDON 1101

SUMMARY - PRIME MINISTER WILSON, IN TUMULTUOUS COMMONS

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SESSION, ANNOUNCED GOVERNMENT'S INTENTION TO HOLD EC

MEMBERSHIP REFERENDUM IN LATE JUNE. ALTHOUGH HE PROMISED CABINET WOULD MAKE COLLECTIVE RECOMMENDATION ON RENEGOTIATED TERMS OF MEMBERSHIP TO ELECTORATE, INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF GOVERNMENT WILL NOT BE BOUND BY CABINET DECISION AND WILL BE FREE TO CAMPAIGN FOR OR AGAINST CONTINUED MEMBERSHIP. HE ALSO SAID GOVERNMENT HAD NOT DECIDED WHETHER IT WOULD APPLY PARTY WHIP WHEN ISSUE SUBSEQUENTLY COMES TO VOTE IN PARLIAMENT. WILSON'S PROPOSALS ARE CLEARLY DESIGNED TO MINIMIZE DIVISIVE EFFECTS ON LABOR PARTY. END SUMMARY

1. PRIME MINISTER WILSON JANUARY 23 TOLD A PACKED HOUSE OF COMMONS THAT GOVERNMENT WILL CONDUCT REFERENDUM ON EC MEMBERSHIP ISSUE AND SET LATE JUNE AS TARGET DATE FOR ACTUAL VOTE. ACCORDING TO WILSON SCENARIO, PARLIAMENT WILL DEBATE ISSUE FULLY AND TAKE FINAL VOTE ON BRITISH MEMBERSHIP FOLLOWING REFERENDUM. THIS VOTE TOO IS SCHEDULED TO OCCUR BEFORE PARLIAMENT RISES FOR SUMMER HOLIDAY.

2. IN DISCUSSING GOVERNMENT'S PLANS TO HANDLE REFERENDUM, WILSON SAID CABINET WILL MAKE FORMAL RECOMMENDATION TO ELECTORATE FOLLOWING COMPLETION OF RENEGOTIATION, BUT THAT INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF GOVERNMENT WILL NOT BE BOUND BY CABINET DECISION. LATTER POINT TRIGGERED UPROAR ON OPPOSITION SIDE, WITH CONSERVATIVE BACKBENCHERS HURLING JEERS AND CATCALLS AT WILSON. CONTINUING, AND HAVING SOME DIFFICULTY IN SPEAKING OVER GENERAL TUMULT, WILSON SAID GOVERNMENT HAS NOT YET DECIDED WHETHER IT WOULD ATTEMPT TO ENFORCE PARTY DISCIPLINE IN SUBSEQUENT PARLIAMENTARY VOTE ON CONTINUED MEMBERSHIP OR PERMIT FREE VOTE. HOWEVER, HE SUGGESTED NEED TO USE WHIP IN PARLIAMENTARY VOTE WOULD BE MINIMAL, AS FEW IF ANY LABOR MPS WOULD VOTE CONTRARY TO WILL OF BRITISH PEOPLE, AS EXPRESSED IN REFERENDUM. HE ALSO REAFFIRMED GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO ABIDE BY REFERENDUM RESULTS.

3. REGARDING OTHER REFERENDUM DETAILS, WILSON SAID GOVERNMENT WILL SHORTLY PUBLISH WHITE PAPER SETTING OUT ARRANGEMENTS AND RULES FOR CONDUCTING REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AGREEMENT AND ACTUAL VOTE. INCLUDING TALLY. TIME WILL BE ALLOWED FOR FULL-SCALE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON THESE

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

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PROPOSALS, AND WILSON INDICATED GOVERNMENT WILL BE OPEN  
TO CHANGES IN ITS RECOMMENDATIONS. FOLLOWING THIS  
DEBATE, "AROUND EASTER TIME," GOVERNMENT WILL INTRODUCE  
LEGISLATION FOR REFERENDUM. THIS BILL WILL GO THROUGH  
COMPLETE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS (I.E. THREE READINGS,  
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COMMITTEE REVIEW AND DEBATE) IN BOTH COMMONS AND LORDS  
AND RECEIVE ROYAL ASSENT "BEFORE THE END OF MAY."

4. CONSERVATIVE OPPOSITION ATTACKED WILSON'S STATEMENT  
ON CONSTITUTIONAL AND PRACTICAL GROUNDS, AND TORY LEADER  
HEATH HEAPED HEAVY SCORN ON WILSON'S DECISION TO ABANDON  
PRINCIPLE OF COLLECTIVE CABINET RESPONSIBILITY ON THIS  
IMPORTANT ISSUE. HEATH ALSO ASKED IF GOVERNMENT WOULD  
RESIGN AND CALL ELECTIONS IN THE EVENT REFERENDUM RESULT  
WENT CONTRARY TO GOVERNMENT'S RECOMMENDATION -- NOT SUR-  
PRISINGLY WILSON SAID IT WOULD NOT. LIBERAL LEADER  
THORPE'S REMARKS WERE GENERALLY SUPPORTIVE OF GOVERNMENT  
PROPOSALS, THOUGH HE TOO CHIDED WILSON ON COLLECTIVE  
RESPONSIBILITY QUESTION. THIS PROMPTED SHARP RIPOSTE  
FROM WILSON WHO NOTED THAT MOST RECENT PRECEDENT HAD  
INVOLVED LIBERALS IN 1932 COALITION GOVERNMENT. WILSON  
ALSO HAD TO CONTEND WITH CARPING OF BACKBENCH TRIBUNITE  
NORMAN ATKINSON WHO CRITICIZED GOVERNMENT FOR DECIDING  
THESE MATTERS PRIOR TO SPECIAL LABOR PARTY CONFERENCE.

5. COMMENT: WHILE WILSON'S ANNOUNCEMENT DISPELLED SOME  
UNCERTAINTIES, IT CONTAINED NO REAL SURPRISES. FURTHER  
DETAILS WILL BE FORTHCOMING IN WHITE PAPER, AND THESE  
WILL NO DOUBT TRIGGER BITTER DEBATE, BUT ARE NOT LIKELY  
TO BE SERIOUS THREAT TO LABOR PARTY UNITY. RULES AND  
CONSTRAINTS ON UNBRIDLED PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN WILL BE  
OF SPECIAL INTEREST. TIMETABLE FOR PASSAGE OF ENABLING  
LEGISLATION IS VERY TIGHT, AND A NUMBER OF HURDLES  
REMAIN: RENEGOTIATION MUST BE COMPLETED; THE CONSERVA-  
TIVES MAY WELL DELAY PASSAGE IN COMMONS; AND THE HOUSE  
OF LORDS, WHERE THE CONSERVATIVES HAVE SOLID MAJORITY,  
MUST APPROVE THE BILL.

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**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
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**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
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**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
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